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Strategic Grants Programs:
Forging New Opportunities

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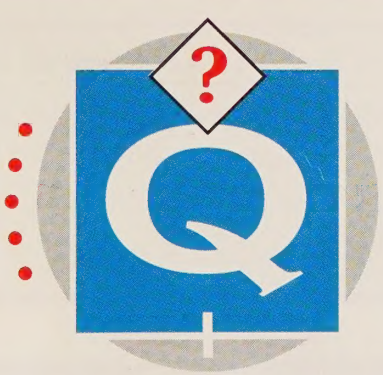
THE STRATEGIC GRANTS PROGRAMS: FORGING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

HAVE YOU ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT TO BECOME INVOLVED IN STRATEGIC RESEARCH WOULD BE TO LOSE YOUR INTELLECTUAL AUTONOMY? HAVE YOU FEARED THAT SSHRC'S STRATEGIC GRANTS PROGRAM WOULD NOT ALLOW YOU TO ADOPT THE VIEWPOINTS YOU DEEM MOST PERTINENT OR TO CHOOSE THE THEORY AND METHODOLOGY YOU JUDGE MOST APPROPRIATE? IN ACTUAL FACT, NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH.

The Strategic Grants Programs are the most fluid of all SSHRC's programs, and are designed to respond both to the needs of the research community, and the needs of our society. The complexity of the issues facing us in the 1990's and beyond calls for an intensified multidisciplinary approach to research. The impacts of new scientific, technological, political, economic and social developments on society and on individuals have become so massive and all pervasive, the single perspective of one discipline is often no longer adequate to deal with the host of current and emerging problems in many cases. However, the multidisciplinary approach can only be truly effective if it becomes synthesized into an interdisciplinary approach. This is what the Strategic Grants Programs are designed to do.

The dynamic driving the Strategic Grants Programs is interaction: interaction between disciplines; between university researchers, the public and the private sectors; and between research and policy. A notable feature of this interaction is that SSHRC's strategic research programs continually evolve to meet changing needs and circumstances in the research environment. In the past few years, for example, existing strategic themes have been revised; new strategic themes have been identified and put in place; and new program components have been introduced and strengthened.

Keeping on top of these changes can be quite a challenge! Here we will briefly address some of the most frequently asked questions and try to clear up some misconceptions about the program.



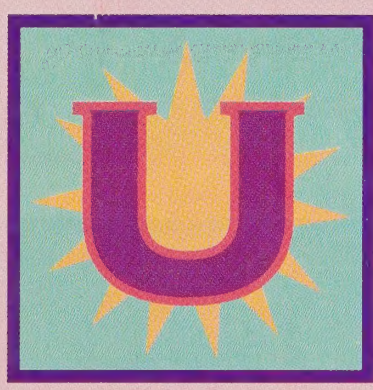
WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY STRATEGIC GRANTS PROGRAMS? HOW MANY PROGRAMS ARE THERE?

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There are two main components or sub-programs under Strategic Grants: Themes and Joint Initiatives (see boxes, pages 3 and 4). Both areas open up many opportunities for researchers to approach their research from multidisciplinary and collaborative perspectives. Both offer researchers the opportunity to frame their research so that it provides useable research results.

STRATEGIC GRANTS PROGRAMS IN A NUTSHELL



Under the Strategic Grants Programs, the Council supports research on issues which are considered to be of national importance and in need of specific focus. To build a critical body of knowledge and research expertise, the program also helps to support the development of effective infrastructures to carry out strategic research in these issue areas. The two main sub-programs are: Themes (developed and funded solely by SSHRC) and Joint Initiatives (established and funded through agreements between SSHRC and public and private sector organizations). Under each of the five themes, four types of support are available:

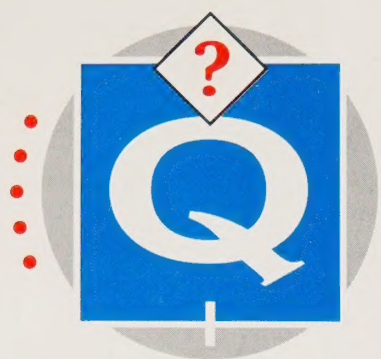
STRATEGIC RESEARCH GRANTS:
up to \$100,000 per year, or \$250,000 over three years; priority is given to multidisciplinary research by teams of two or more researchers;

STRATEGIC RESEARCH WORKSHOPS GRANTS:
up to \$15,000 per workshop (maximum of three over three years) to examine research topics, delineate research needs, elaborate research methodologies or communicate research results;

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT GRANTS:
up to \$5,000 to help researchers seek out potential research partners and explore possibilities for collaborative research;

STRATEGIC RESEARCH NETWORKS GRANTS:
up to \$40,000 per year for up to three years, to help create and sustain multidisciplinary networks of researchers (at least five researchers at three institutions) engaging in collaborative research activities.

The type of support available under each Joint Initiative varies, depending upon the agreements negotiated between SSHRC and the co-sponsor(s).



WHAT'S THE PURPOSE OF THE "STRATEGIC THEMES"?

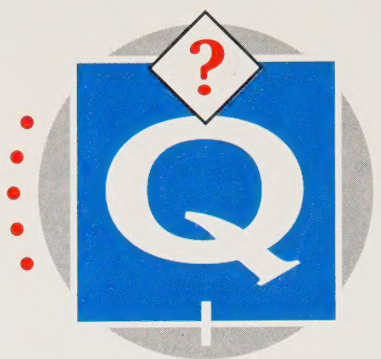
HOW DO THEY WORK?

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Strategic theme research is the cornerstone of the Strategic Grants Programs. Thematic research is targeted, pragmatic, problem-oriented, multidisciplinary research that concentrates on social issues of national importance. Put another way, thematic research is basic research that is mission oriented. Key objectives are to build a body of knowledge and critical mass of researchers in these areas — and to generate research results which can be used to develop social and economic policy, to help practitioners in various fields improve the delivery of their services, and so on. Another central objective is to encourage the formation of **research partnerships** among university researchers and the public and private sectors. To determine whether the thematic research program is meeting these objectives, the individual themes and the overall program mix are periodically evaluated, and modified as required.

There are usually five different themes at any one time under which Council offers support. The basic "life span" of each theme is five years. After the third year, a thorough review is carried out to assess overall progress in focusing research interest and generating a critical body of knowledge in the theme area. Should an extension be judged necessary, the program can be renewed for another three years beyond the initial five.

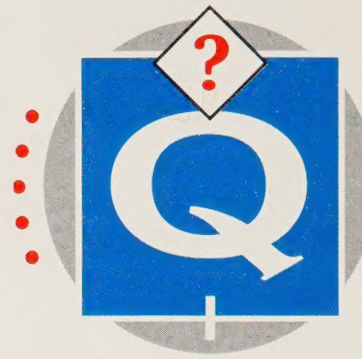


WILL DOING RESEARCH UNDER ONE OF THE STRATEGIC THEMES COMPROMISE MY AUTONOMY AS A RESEARCHER?

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Strategic theme research, while orienting research towards broadly defined issues of national importance and concern, still respects the intellectual autonomy of the researcher. The researcher is completely free to adopt the viewpoints that seem most pertinent, and is free to choose the theory and methodology judged most appropriate. While SSHRC gives priority to proposals for multidisciplinary research, the researcher is nonetheless free to establish the parameters of the research project within the proposed theme. In a multidisciplinary project, this delimitation need not be restricted to the social sciences and humanities. Interdisciplinary research in the Applied Ethics theme, for example, can include disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, the medical sciences, and the natural sciences and engineering.



CAN YOU TELL ME MORE ABOUT STRATEGIC RESEARCH NETWORKS?

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Strategic research networks grants constitute one of the four components of support available within the thematic programs. Like the other three components (see box, page 1), Strategic research networks support collaborative research by bringing together and sustaining multidisciplinary networks of researchers. A principal investigator may apply for a networks grant along with any other strategic grant component.

The research network, involving at least five researchers in three unaffiliated institutions, helps focus research on a specific problem (or set of problems) and, with the combined perspective of different disciplines, finds solutions through interdisciplinary synthesis.

STRATEGIC THEMES CURRENTLY IN EFFECT

- Applied Ethics
- Education and Work in a Changing Society
- Managing For Global Competitiveness
- Science and Technology Policy in Canada
- Women and Work



Under the **Managing for Global Competitiveness** theme, an interdisciplinary team of researchers at Laval University is looking at the enormous changes taking place in the fields of trade and economics. They are examining the conditions needed for small-to-medium-sized businesses (SMB) to survive and prosper in the new global context. Headed by Gérald d'Amboise, a professor of management in Laval's faculty of administrative science, the partners in the project include Laval's Yvon Gasse, head of the Institute

for Research on Public Policy, and several experts in economics, business management and statistics.

Between 1988 and 1991, the researchers tracked the performances of 66 Quebec manufacturing firms with annual sales of less than \$20 million and 10 to 500 employees. The longitudinal study focused on a number of factors potentially affecting the competitiveness of these firms—the environment each operates within, the firm's strategic goals, levels of planning, and the personal characteristics of the firm's owner-manager, among other variables.

"The things we're finding out will eventually be used to establish an ideal model to help SMBs achieve the best performance possible in the global marketplace", says Professor d'Amboise. And with only about 50 prominent scholars in North America conducting SMB research, building a critical body of knowledge in this area is an important goal for Canada.

D'Amboise adds that, to date, most research on SMBs has been guided by methods of inquiry structured for larger firms. This shortcoming demonstrates the urgent need for specifically targeted research in this field. "When doing research on small business you must have an appreciation for what's really going

on, being a little more grounded in the reality of SMBs." The Laval study is intended to help fill the gap. Like the strategic theme it is funded under, the project addresses itself to an emerging need in an area of national importance.

Like many other strategic projects, the kind of research being conducted by d'Amboise and his colleagues doesn't, as he noted, "fit into what we usually call the traditional or classical paradigm, which is done according to the deductive model of hypothesis and testing. But when you're confronting new issues, difficult issues that are not yet explained or understood you have to be a little more inductive. Our research adds a qualitative approach to the quantitative."

Training the next generation of scholarly researchers in new methods of inquiry is another challenge d'Amboise sees as an important component of strategic research. Three students have been assisting him on the project while completing their master's thesis. "That's one of the interesting parts of these grants, the fact that we're able to pay students to work with our data, help us with interviews. It's a kind of joint venture, with me as their coach."



network has been organized by Dr. Harold Coward, Director of the Calgary Institute for the Humanities who, along with a twelve member team, was awarded a three-year Strategic Research Networks Grant under the **Applied Ethics**

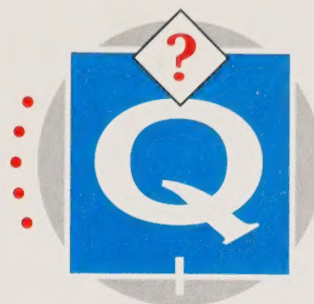
theme in 1990. His team, made up of scholars from Philosophy, Economics, Geography-Meteorology, Physics, Law, Environmental Design, and Religious Studies, is examining ethics and climate change, focusing specifically on the greenhouse effect. "Network research", observes Dr. Coward, "involves a combination of team meetings, conference calls, constant communication and individual work in various locations. The interdisciplinary approach requires an ongoing process of dialogue among team members rather than a collection of solitudes examining a common problem from isolated disciplinary perspectives."

With the Calgary Institute for the Humanities serving as the administrative hub for the research network, the research team is carrying out a series of interdisciplinary consultations that evaluate the ethics of different possible responses to the greenhouse effect. The recommendations that follow will be published by Wilfred Laurier University Press in 1993, together with a policy study book prepared for non-academic audiences. The team has also planned a series of five regional policy workshops during the summer of 1993 that will bring together the general public and key decision-makers in government, industry, the private sector and the media. Shell Canada Ltd., and the Canadian Petroleum Association are acting as partners to the Network, not

only augmenting funds to SSHRC's three-year grant, but also providing consultants to the team.

"The common task for all members of the team", according to Dr. Coward, "will be to arrive at some understanding of the disciplinary perspectives of other team members on the common enterprise. It will therefore be expected that each person's work will be affected by that of the others." Such an approach does present methodological problems, and they have arisen in this study. "There are always problems in getting different disciplines to work together, but they can be worked out with a little effort." Dr. Coward added that there is also often a difficulty in getting industry to engage in the open-ended kind of research that characterizes a network of this type. "Initially our partners were a little skeptical; now they are very excited with the interdisciplinary approach and the way in which it can so effectively inform the problem we are dealing with."

Besides being a very cost-effective method of engaging in interdisciplinary research, Dr. Coward notes that the network model also "affords the formulation of results along a two track approach." As such, it acts effectively as a bridge between the academic and the public and private sectors. When disseminating the results of the research, formats can be developed to make the research understood equally well both by a highly specialized as well a lay audience. In terms of informing policy-makers, the experience of engaging in strategic research can be very rewarding. Dr. Coward's project has already led to the development of a policy statement on ethics and climate change: 'Ethical Considerations as a Foundation for Canada's Strategy on Climate Change'. It has been submitted to the Canadian Participatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), to be held in Brazil later this year.



WHAT'S THE DEFINITION OF A RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP? WHAT ROLE DO RESEARCH PARTNERS PLAY?



As mentioned earlier, SSHRC is particularly interested in promoting research partnerships within its strategic themes programs. The aim of research partnerships is to create links between academics, practitioners and policy makers, enhancing the effectiveness and impact of their individual and collective efforts, raising the awareness of issues in the public and private sectors and in the general public, and helping to come up with new approaches to important national issues and concerns.

Specifically, a research partner is an organization in the public, private or non-profit sector which has an interest or stake in, and a real contribution to make, to a research project under one of the strategic themes.

Individuals cannot be partners, nor can institutes or bodies which are part of, or affiliated with post-secondary educational institutions. While the partner does not have the status of a co-applicant on an application for a Strategic Programs grant, the partner(s)' involvement does form an integral part of the research application, and the merits of the proposed partnership are carefully assessed in the adjudication of applications.

As a partner, an organization must make a significant contribution to the strategic research project. Contributions may be financial in nature or they may take the form of access to the use of facilities, access to expertise, or the organization's network or staff time. Moreover, the partner should be a full participant in as many phases or aspects of the research as possible, including problem definition, execution of the research, and dissemination of the research findings. In other words, the partner must be a 'stakeholder' in the research. While the research conducted must be of a scholarly nature and yield research findings that are generalizable, the partner should also benefit in some way from the research — for example, as a potential user of the results generated.

On the whole, partnerships give the researcher the opportunity to collaborate not only with other academics, but also with those in the public and private sectors who are involved with social, political, macro-economic and cultural issues, and who can put the research to immediate use.

Of the 98 successful applications in the 1991-92 Strategic Grants competitions, 36 included partnerships of one or more partners for a total of 96 partners. 39 of these were from the private sector, 54 from the public and parapublic sectors, and 3 from universities. Financial contributions were offered by 21 partners.



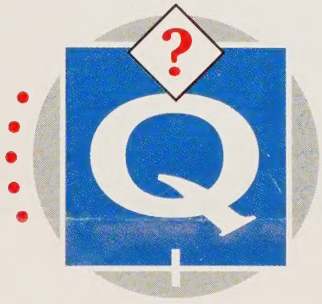
WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE STRATEGIC THEMES AND JOINT INITIATIVES?

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In simplest terms, strategic themes programs are those established and funded directly by SSHRC, with a maximum of five theme programs in operation at any one time. They generally exist for a period of five years (with the possibility of an extension for a further three years, as necessary) and have a common submission deadline in October each year.

Joint Initiatives are similar to strategic themes in that they focus on contemporary issues and promote multi-disciplinary, collaborative approaches to research, but differ in that they are jointly defined and jointly funded through agreements between SSHRC and private organizations, government agencies, or community organizations. There is no specific limit on the number of Joint Initiatives in operation at once. New initiatives can evolve at any time as SSHRC and interested organizations identify areas where they may have a common interest in promoting research activities. The duration of each initiative and the specific nature of the research support to be offered is negotiated between SSHRC and the Joint Initiative partner. Also, the submission deadline(s) for each Initiative vary, according to the timing needs of each program.



IS IT POSSIBLE FOR RESEARCHERS TO SET UP A JOINT INITIATIVE WITH SSHRC IN AREAS WHICH INTEREST THEM?

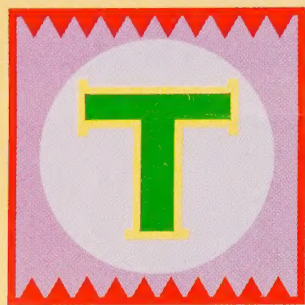
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Basically not. Researchers can establish research partnerships for specific research projects under any of the strategic themes, but individual researchers, or groups of researchers, are not eligible to establish Joint Initiatives with SSHRC. The responsibility for the leadership and administration of the Joint Initiatives Program lies entirely with the Council. Once the Council has finalised the negotiation of a joint research initiative with interested partner organization(s), a program is announced and a competition is launched. It is only at that point that researchers submit their applications to SSHRC for funding under the new initiative. As in all other research support programs at SSHRC, Joint Initiatives applicants are subject to peer evaluation. While the external partners are invited to advise on program design, neither their representatives, nor SSHRC's representatives, sit as members of the adjudication committees.

JOINT INITIATIVES ESTABLISHED TO DATE

- Aboriginal Affairs (with the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development);
- Canadian Global Change Program (with NSERC);
- Support for A State-of-the-Art Review of Cultural Development in an Open Economy (with the Department of Communications);
- Family Violence and Violence Against Women (with Health and Welfare Canada);
- Health Promotion Research (with Health and Welfare Canada);
- Law and Social Issues in Canada (with the Department of Justice);
- Science Culture in Canada (with Northern Telecom Canada Ltd.);
- Support for A State-of-the-Art Review of Research on Arts Literacy in Canada (with the Canada Council);
- Support for A State-of-the-Art Review of Research on Canada's Multicultural Society (with Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada);
- Chairs in the Management of Technological Change (with NSERC).



he Joint Initiative on **Law and Social Issues in Canada**, which SSHRC launched last year, has provided one group of researchers with a unique opportunity to bring sociological and legal approaches to bear on a critical assessment of the appropriate uses and limitations of criminal law.

Jane Ursel, a sociologist, and Alvin Esau, professor of law and head of the Legal Research Institute, at the University of Manitoba have teamed up to study the first Family Violence Court ever established in North America. Judges, lawyers, policy-makers and social service workers in several jurisdictions across Canada are watching the two-year-old court to see how effective it is in addressing one of society's most disturbing criminal problems.

Ursel has been providing her data to practitioners and policy-makers in other jurisdictions interested in either applying or adopting the Manitoba model. Her findings are also being used by the Justice Department to help refine this unique experiment in law. "In this case we're more than an after-the-fact assessment," says Ursel, the research project's leader. "We're an immediate feed-in into the program and policy development."

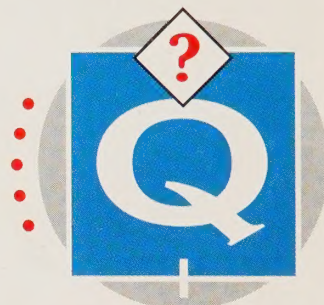
Providing such useful data to a program affecting a large community is especially valuable to the researcher, says Ursel, because it links theory, research and policy in a direct and explicit way. "It permits researchers to feel

much more grounded in the kind of endeavors they undertake because they will actually see the outcome. It's a researcher's dream ... a real high to see your data being used almost immediately to expand a program or change a program that has real impact on people. It's research directly in service of the community."

Taking a multidisciplinary approach to the research was essential in this project. Says Ursel: "The only way it could be truly useful to a larger community of service providers was for it to encompass the range of issues involved — social services, the criminal justice system, technical points of law, jurisprudence, as well as larger social policy concerns dealing with family violence. To accomplish what we set out to do, which is to have a better understanding of a particular court as well as its larger impact on the community, we needed a multidisciplinary team to attend to all the different facets of the program."

The working contacts she was able to make through the project's multidisciplinary research network proved rewarding in more ways than one: "It facilitated my achieving funding for the second year," said Ursel. "The combination of legal and sociological approaches sparked the interest of the Manitoba Law Foundation, which, I'm delighted to say, will continue funding the project beyond the \$10,000 development grant I received from SSHRC."

Working with law professors, judges, lawyers and students of law thus connected Ursel with a broader range of people who will use her research and gave her access to more sources of funding. "And let's face it," she remarked, "if you've got a SSHRC research grant, that's a big name. It gives you legitimacy."



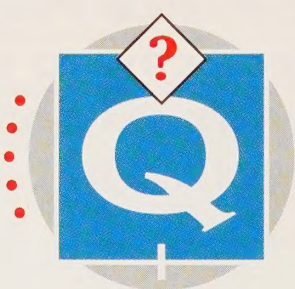
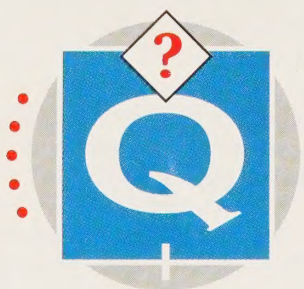
WHY IS SSHRC PUTTING SUCH AN EMPHASIS ON THE COMMUNICATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS?



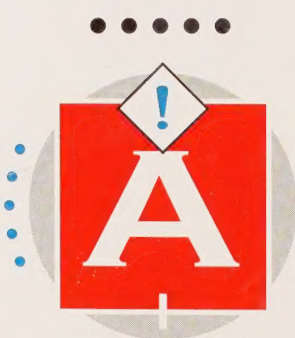
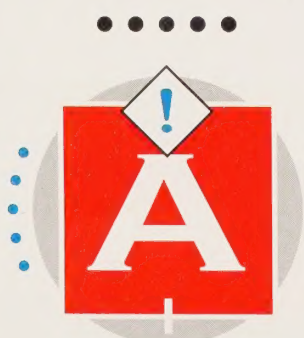
We live in a complicated, interdependent world, where no part of society can afford to live apart from its whole. So it is with research. Research is not an activity that can take place in isolation from the larger society in which it is being done. The objective of all research — basic or strategic — is knowledge-building, working to understand the human condition and to shed light on the problems we face as our society evolves. But to build a base for sound collective problem-solving and decision-making, the doing of research is not enough: the results need to be communicated to those who can use them in a way that can be readily understood.

Within the academic community, researchers need to know about the key developments in their own and related disciplines to help define worthwhile research goals and avoid duplication of effort. Beyond the academic community, policy makers need research results to develop truly effective policies on important national issues and concerns. And the general public needs to know how this research contributes to the advancement of basic knowledge and how it can enrich their understanding of the world in which they live.

In sum, the Strategic Grants Programs have put an emphasis on developing multidisciplinary "team" programs of research, the setting up of research networks, and the establishing of research partnerships and Joint Initiatives between the universities and the public and private sectors. In addition to bringing an important range of research expertise to bear on complex societal problems, this approach will widen the communications circle as researchers from different fields and venues work together within a larger network of contacts. Within this wider circle, researchers will be in a better position to get more research results to those who can put them to use in the development of policy within both the public and private sectors. Ultimately, this benefits us all.



OVERALL, WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THE STRATEGIC GRANTS PROGRAMS?

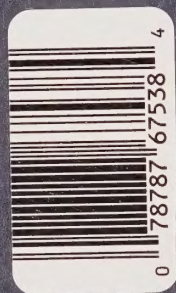


In promoting problem-oriented research, these programs foster multisectoral consultation, communication between researchers and users of research, and the integration of research results with policy making and socio-economic development. The programs go a long way in demonstrating the vital national role and contribution of research in the social sciences and humanities. Outside partners are given the opportunity to contribute to the development of quality research in areas close to their interests. Researchers, free to define their objectives, workplan and methodologies, have the opportunity of seeing their research become quickly relevant as part of social and economic policy development.

ARE THERE ANY OTHER FEATURES OF THE STRATEGIC GRANTS PROGRAMS I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT?

The Council is helping to increase the flow of research results to a wider audience, including policy-makers and practitioners in the public and private sectors, through various measures. For example, all strategic grants research proposals must identify plans for communicating research results within and beyond the academic community. Successful applicants are encouraged to spend up to 10 per cent of the funds they receive on eligible communications activities — such as giving papers at conferences, or organizing seminars and workshops with policy-makers or other potential users of the research, or communicating via the popular media. Clearly not every piece of research can or should be regarded as suitable for broad dissemination. What is important, rather, is that the researcher be open to the idea of imaginatively communicating research results to non-academic audiences in the appropriate manner.





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